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Cochran VA Medical Center Update:

Demands VA Provide Details On Number of Positive Hepatitis, HIV Cases, Respond to Weeks-Old Inquiries

(WASHINGTON, DC) - Congressman Russ Carnahan (MO-3) today expressed frustration with the slow pace of answers coming from the U.S. Veterans Affairs Department regarding some of the most pressing questions related to the ongoing investigation into the recent safety lapses at the John Cochran VA Medical Center in St. Louis.

"This is not a question of public relations; it is a question of public health, and I would expect the VA to treat it as such," Carnahan said in a sharply worded letter he sent today to U.S. VA Secretary Eric Shinseki. **"There are 1812 veterans - not to mention their spouses and partners, who deserve to know everything that the VA does about this situation."**

Carnahan demanded that the VA respond promptly to questions posed during the official House Veterans Affairs Committee field hearing, held last Tuesday in St. Louis, regarding the number of identified cases of Hepatitis and or HIV among veterans who received treatment at the dental clinic.

"This question has become increasingly important as we have learned that at least one previously healthy veteran became gravely ill with Hepatitis B after receiving multiple procedures in the Cochran dental clinic," Carnahan wrote. **"While I recognize that testing is still underway, I am at a loss as to why the VA has yet to indicate how many cases**

have been reported to date."

Carnahan also demanded that the VA respond to a series of questions he posed in letters sent to the agency 3 weeks ago, including an accounting of what steps are being taken to encourage current and former Cochran employees to come forward with information relevant to the investigation.

"This last question is especially important because at least one former John Cochran employee that raised concerns to supervisors about sterile processing has been terminated," Carnahan noted.

Carnahan said he would continue to press the VA on these and other questions, and hoped to speak by phone with Shinseki as early as today to follow up on the letter.

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